

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the only agency of the U.S. government whose primary responsibility is fish, wildlife and plant conservation. The Service protects a healthy environment for people, fish and wildlife, and helps Americans conserve and enjoy the outdoors and our living treasures. The Service's responsibilities are for migratory birds, endangered species, certain marine animals, and freshwater and anadromous fish.

Middle Island
Janet Butler/USFWS

Ohio River Islands
National Wildlife Refuge
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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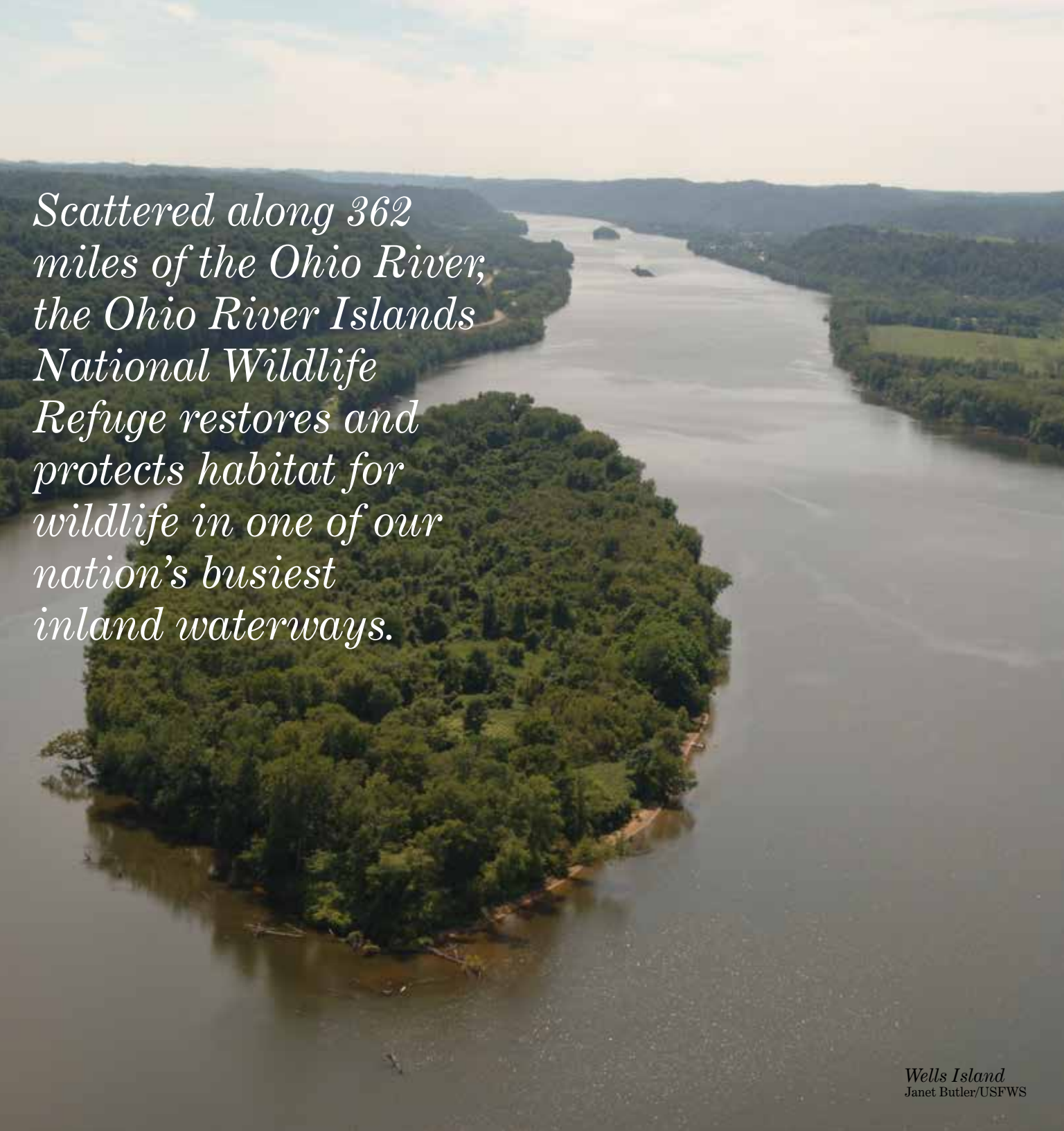
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ohio River Islands

National Wildlife Refuge



Female belted kingfisher
Cal Vornberger



*Scattered along 362
miles of the Ohio River,
the Ohio River Islands
National Wildlife
Refuge restores and
protects habitat for
wildlife in one of our
nation's busiest
inland waterways.*

About the Refuge



This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Why a Refuge?

The Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 550 refuges and other units in the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest and most diverse network of lands and waters devoted specifically to wildlife. Refuges are places where wildlife comes first!

This refuge began with the purchase of eight islands by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1990. Today, the refuge includes two islands in Pennsylvania, eighteen islands and three mainland tracts in West Virginia, and two islands in Kentucky. Additional properties may be acquired in the future.

The Ohio River today has little in common with the wild, free-flowing river of two hundred years ago. Industrial expansion, dam building, sand and gravel dredging, and other human influences have reduced both the quantity and quality of the river's wildlife habitat.

The Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge helps safeguard a future for wildlife on over 3,000 acres of land and underwater habitat. The refuge works to protect, restore, and enhance habitat for wildlife native to the river's floodplain.

Protecting Islands

The sand and gravel deposits associated with the islands are one of the refuge's most important underwater habitats for supporting native freshwater mussels, including several endangered species. These legacies of the last Ice Age are protected today from dredging, but many islands show damage from past activity. The effects of navigation and high water continue to hasten island erosion. The refuge is working to stabilize riverbanks and reclaim lost shoreline with help from partners.



Mature bottomland hardwood forest

Gene Hilton/USFWS



Volunteer tree planters

Dewayne & Ginnie Lowther

Restoring Habitat

Restoring the river's floodplain forest habitat is a refuge priority. Current habitat conditions range from open fields and recently planted tree seedlings, to remnant giants of silver maple, cottonwood, and sycamore. While natural processes are re-growing much of the island forests, the refuge also plants many species of native trees and shrubs to help create more diverse wildlife habitat.



Buckley Island erosion control project

Dean Rhine/USFWS



Japanese knotweed

Non-native plants are one of the greatest threats to wildlife habitat on the refuge. Japanese knotweed, mile-a-minute weed, and many other unwelcome invaders crowd out native plants, changing the character and quality of the habitats. Controlling these exotic plants is essential to restoring habitat.

Wildlife

Birds

Refuge wildlife ranges from tree-top dwellers to underwater inhabitants. Refuge wildlife management focuses on migratory birds, freshwater mussels, and endangered species.

Nearly 200 species of birds use refuge lands and surrounding waters. Many are present only during migration when they stop to feed and rest. Providing high quality habitat for migratory birds ranks among the refuge's most important goals.

Bald eagles linger along the river mainly during the colder months. The river's fish also attract osprey, a bird most common in spring, summer and fall.

Waterfowl, including wood ducks, mallards, and Canada geese, nest on the refuge. Others, such as mergansers, scaups, and buffleheads, are frequent winter visitors.

Tiny warblers stand out in spring. Some stop at the refuge for rest and meals of insects during migration journeys that may take them thousands of miles. Others, like the prothonotary warbler, often stay to nest.



Neal J. Hohman

Screech owl



Bruce VanBremer

Prothonotary warbler

Great blue herons flourish along the river, just one of many wading and shorebird species that feed in or around shallow waters. Several great blue heron nesting rookeries are known along the refuge's stretch of river.

Mammals

White-tailed deer, fox squirrel, raccoon, woodchuck, cottontail rabbit, and red fox are some of the most frequently seen mammals on the refuge. Small rodents such as mice, voles, and shrews hide in the grass and undergrowth to avoid predators.

Opossum



Dean Rhine/USFWS

Beaver and muskrat spend most of their time in water but leave signs of their presence on many of the islands. Night brings out the southern flying squirrel and at least six species of bats.

Fish

A range of deep and shallow water habitats surrounding refuge islands support over 100 species of fish. The presence of smallmouth and largemouth bass, white bass, channel and flathead catfish, and sauger make fishing a popular sport. Many native non-game fish add to the diversity.



Janet Butler/USFWS

Mussel diversity

Freshwater Mussels

Freshwater mussels act like little water-filtration pumps on the bottom of the river. Just by feeding, they clean the water. Forty species of freshwater mussels occur on the refuge, including the endangered pink mucket and the fanshell. Freshwater mussels are among the nation's most imperiled wildlife. The refuge's underwater sand and gravel deposits provide vital mussel habitat.

The invasion of the Ohio River by non-native zebra mussels threatens native mussel survival. The refuge is working with partners to conserve native mussels throughout the Ohio River watershed.

Other Wildlife

Frogs, toads, non-poisonous snakes, and turtles also live on the refuge. Butterflies stand out among many insects during the warmer months.



Timothy Hoeflich

Zebra swallowtail butterfly

Enjoying the Refuge

Visitors are welcome on the refuge. Refuge lands are open to the public from one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset, with emphasis on wildlife-dependent recreation.

Refuge islands are accessible only by private boat except for Middle Island near St. Marys, WV, which has a bridge. A small refuge parcel on Wheeling Island can be reached by walking from Belle Isle Park. Carry-down boat access is available near refuge headquarters for small boats, canoes, and kayaks. Public boat ramps located off of the refuge provide river access for larger boats.

Visitor Contact Station

The refuge's new headquarters includes a visitor contact station located two miles outside of Williamstown, WV, on County Rd. 1 (Waverly Road). Visitors can view exhibits about refuge wildlife, history, and public use. This facility is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on a Mon. – Sat. schedule from April through November; and Mon. – Fri. the remainder of the year (same hours). It is closed on all federal holidays.



Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge headquarters

Janet Butler/USFWS



Janet Butler/USFWS

Anglers at Buckley Island

Fishing

Some of the best fishing in the Ohio River occurs around the islands. All refuge islands are open to fishing during refuge open hours with state regulations in effect.

Two mainland fishing dikes are available along the shoreline near the refuge headquarters. One of the dikes offers barrier-free access from a paved parking area. Middle Island also offers a fishing dike, providing walk-down access to the river.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

The refuge works with teachers to provide outdoor education activities for school groups. School, civic, and professional groups may arrange for talks and tours by contacting the refuge.

A signed auto tour on Middle Island explains the refuge's actions to restore this island's habitat. A nature trail on the island takes visitors through a range of wildlife habitats. This trail is open to foot traffic only.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

A network of short walking trails near the refuge headquarters range from gentle bottomland terrain with views of the river to access into wooded hills. A paved, barrier-free trail starts at the refuge headquarters.



Janet Butler/USFWS

Photographer

Hunting

Middle Island offers a wildlife observation blind along its nature trail. The observation blind and the trail leading to it are barrier-free.

Most refuge islands are open to hunting with special regulations in effect. Hunters should contact the refuge for the required permit. Appropriate state licenses are also required. Opportunities include archery deer, waterfowl, dove, rabbit, and squirrel hunting.

Other Activities

The refuge and its Friends organization offer special activities and events throughout the year with emphasis on children's activities during the summer. Contact the refuge for more information.



Neal J. Hohman

Wood duck pair



Janet Butler/USFWS

Volunteers

Want to Volunteer?

Contact the refuge to learn how you can become involved with the refuge. Volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks matched to their interests, skills, and availability.

Important Information for Visitors

The refuge is open daily from one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset unless otherwise posted. To protect refuge resources and to ensure a safe and enjoyable visit, please note the following information:

- Boating and beach use are permitted unless otherwise posted.
- Take only pictures; leave only footprints. Take your trash home.
- Pets must be kept and controlled on a leash and are not allowed to roam freely.
- Bicycles are permitted on designated refuge roads and are not allowed on trails.

Buckley Island gravel head



Gene Hilton/USFWS

The following activities or items are prohibited:

- All-terrain vehicles are not permitted anywhere on the refuge.
- No woodcutting or mowing is allowed.
- Camping and campfires are prohibited.
- No overnight boat mooring is allowed.
- No permanent structures such as tree stands, stairways, rope swings, and water slides are permitted.

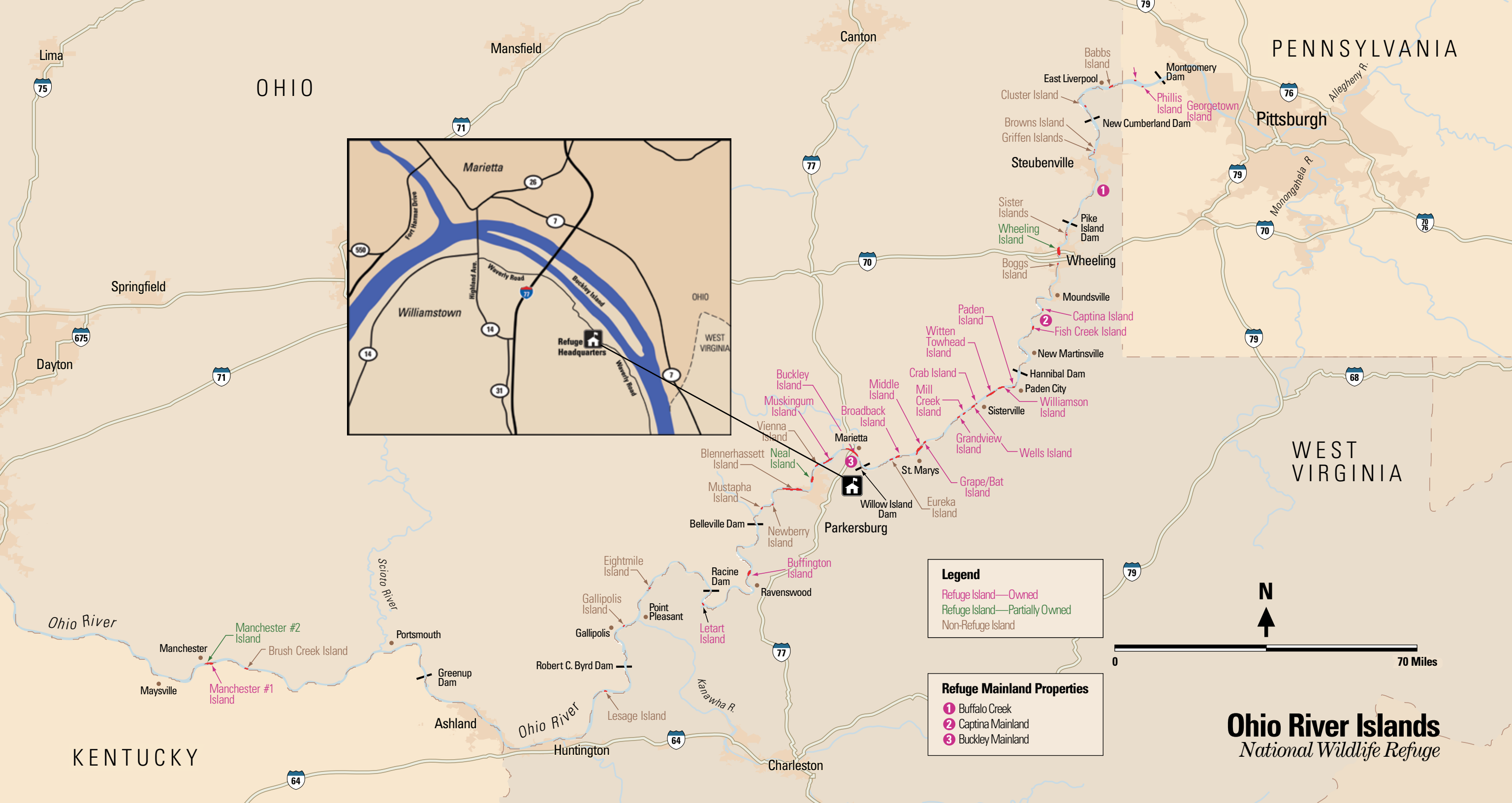
Federal law prohibits searching for or collecting historical artifacts on the refuge. Please help protect sites by leaving artifacts in place and reporting locations to refuge staff.

Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on the refuge must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).

Yellow-rumped warbler



Neal J. Hohman



OHIO

PENNSYLVANIA

WEST VIRGINIA

KENTUCKY

Ohio River Islands

National Wildlife Refuge

Legend

- Refuge Island—Owned
- Refuge Island—Partially Owned
- Non-Refuge Island

Refuge Mainland Properties

- 1 Buffalo Creek
- 2 Captina Mainland
- 3 Buckley Mainland